Shining Star

George E. Weil was hell bent to be the best he could be. He was focused and driven from the moment he decided to make a career jump, out of the missile silos and into a staff position. George had made Captain, and he was all about self-image. His plans were calculated and meticulous. He seemed forever in a hurry to take on additional duties and tackle educational requirements; all to make himself look better and brighter than anyone else come promotion time. Capt. George E. Weil had stars in his eyes.

Once I turned into a mother, George turned into a pseudo father. He was very proud of his daughter. He had three sons from his first marriage but took no interest in their lives. When his only daughter arrived, he was very happy and engaged – briefly.

I took odd jobs working in the civilian sector, after my departure from active duty. I worked for about a year with the Cheyenne Medical clinic as a receptionist and scheduler. Then briefly as a salesperson for a restaurant supply company. Finally, for the duration we were in Wyoming, I held my own working with the Cheyenne Rocky Mountain Safety Co. They made traffic signs, painted road stripes plus set up safety cones and barrels for road construction projects.

Little Crystal as old enough now to graduate from smoky 'Grandma's Infant Daycare' to enroll in the Montessori school of 'La Petite Academy'. George's priority remained his Air Force career. He seemed to be on borrowed time. George could not be bothered with simple joys regarding family. I never saw George push his daughter on a swing or catch her at the base of a slide. We never took family vacations for ourselves.

Crystal was just starting kindergarten when George got orders to Vandenberg AFB, California. Before leaving, George and I attended one last 'Coronation (corn) Ball' held at the Hitching Post in downtown Cheyenne. It was a military sponsored event that heralded the crowning of the next Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo Queen. The military helped serve

the hundreds of guests in true boot camp, chow hall fashion. There is quite a science to handling a huge mob of people through several buffet lines. The Master of Ceremony took pride in announcing 'x' number of people were fed within so many minutes. We also attended a retirement ceremony at the base Officer's Club. While chatting with friends Lee and Michelle Cox, the shrill notes of a Scottish bagpipe engulfed the room. A sudden grip of recognition and melancholy overtook me! Instantly tears rushed to my eyes and I had a tightness in my chest for the duration of the pipes stirring rendition. Where the heck did THAT come from? (*It came from the clans of Logan and Grant; generations from the Scottish Highlands I descended from but knew nothing about at this point in time*.)

Our tour to Vandenberg AFB was very enjoyable in that we were so much closer to our families in Southern California. Grandparents love grandchildren. Driving south to visit family became the only overnight vacation George would take. There were day trips to Solvang, Disneyland and Monterey Bay, but George was not willing to use the 30 days a year vacation time he was allocated. Often, he lost accrued leave days.

While we were assigned to Vandenberg AFB in 1991, George was trained to be an inspector for the 3901st Strategic Missile Evaluation Squadron (SMES). He was part of the team that traveled to states that held missile squadrons, testing their military readiness. George's affiliation with SMES would become my catalyst for 'karma' a few years later.

This assignment, on the coast near Lompoc, became my favorite. Immense flower fields filled hundreds of acres with bright swaths of color. Huge eucalyptus and oaks slowed the coastal fog's daily creep inland – the fragrance reminded me of home.

Vandenberg was where I first signed on with the Arts and Crafts Center on base. I worked primarily in the frame shop, where I cut mats and assembled frames for the customer's artwork. I enjoyed the challenge of joining color and composition to enhance a patron's print or needlework. From this point onward, I worked in this field at every base we were assigned, for the next decade.

The greatest joy was our proximity to the beach. It was a 15-minute ride from the south gate of the base. Crystal and I went there as often as we could. George joined us only once, and he grumbled all the while.

We lived on base in family officer housing. Even the housing was segregated from the lower enlisted class. Crystal made friends with a younger girl across the street. Little Stephanie was in kindergarten while Crystal was in first grade. Some weekends I would take them to a park or local waterfall. Friends would become a luxury for our only child. She quickly understood friends were temporary, as we were soon packing for a new assignment every few years.

Training at Vandenberg became a steppingstone back to Cheyenne in 1993. Being close to my parents, I imposed upon their good nature by asking them to babysit Crystal and 3 cats. We had Sia and Mese from Wyoming, plus a little calico kitten Callie I adopted from a cat shelter in Lompoc. We were eligible to live in the historic brick quarters on F.E. Warren AFB, however we had to wait several months before moving into one. Therefore, we had to scramble to find rental housing. We eventually all got back together and took up residence in quarters 18-B Ft. Warren Ave. from 1994 -1996.

George was busy as Chief of Personnel, rubbing all the right elbows in his effort to climb the commissioned ladder. I slid effortlessly into the Arts and Crafts Center, while Crystal blossomed into a feisty young tomboy.

I remained little Crystal's foundation during these years. She was old enough to venture out on her own. F.E. Warren occasionally hosted historical rendezvous where the public could enjoy the sights, sounds, tastes and handicrafts of life in the late 1800's. Crystal and first boyfriend Josh Peace rode bikes to the rendezvous and parlayed their allowances for bits of fur from a mountain man trapper. This was the same young man who was helping Crystal build a tree house from lumber 'scraps' taken from a nearby construction zone. Not until Crystal was found running off with the family axe did, we realize what was going on.

F.E. Warren was unusual in that it was not only home to the 'Mighty Ninety' missile squadron, but also to many groups of pronghorn antelope. Family housing, the parade field and the

golf course was regular haunts of a large herd of pronghorns. Shortly after we left F.E. Warren the first time (1990), a little white fawn was born. When we returned for the second assignment (1993), the fawn was a full-grown pronghorn buck.

My penchant for art inspired me to create two, color pencil prints, depicting the historic brick architecture and the white antelope. The first print was of our family quarters with the adult white antelope plus friends, munching on the lawn. It was titled, "Breakfast at the Bricks". The second print was of Canadian geese gathering in front of the Wing Commander's quarters. The little white antelope with parents resting in the foreground. The print title was, "Commander's Call".

Sadly, the white antelope died on the nearby highway when hit by a car. I was instrumental in claiming the antelopes' meager remains, and I retained a local taxidermist to create a facsimile of the white antelope. The head mount, with history, was ensconced within the newly created Antelope Recreation Center."

It was a treat to be living amongst this semi-wild herd. One morning, Crystal and I watched a pronghorn buck just below us, from our elevated kitchen window. It was interested in my flower bed, and gingerly ducked under the string boarder to begin munching. "*Watch*." I whispered. Sure enough, a sudden sound caused the buck to jerk its head up, taking my boarder string and wooden stakes with him.

Another memorable moment occurred when Crystal and I were walking down the back alley in the wintertime. A small herd of pronghorns came running down the alley towards us. We stopped and I pulled Crystal closer to me. "*Be still*." I told her. The little group split in half and ran around us, hardly breaking their stride.

Captain George found these stories amusing; however, he was not happy when I began to rescue porcupines. "*I don't want to be called to the Security Police desk to explain why my wife is covered in quills*!"

I was more concerned with the school kids that had a bus stop, right where the porcupine decided to dine. I scooped up the grumpy little critter in a plastic trash can, loaded it in the back of my gold Dodge truck and drove to the other end of the base. I deposited the beastie near a creek with cottonwood trees. A day or two later another (or the same?) porcupine appeared in front of our brick quarters. Crystal called him "Sonic" like the Hedgehog.

While I busied myself with the local wildlife, Crystal was doing very well in school, plus learning from the likes of televisions "Slappy Squirrel" on Animaniacs.

"*Sometimes you feel like a nut…*" Crystal declared after playfully smacking me on the nose. Of course, I could not be angry with an explanation like that.

Day and night George was in his own grandiose world. He strove hard to complete lessons from the Naval War College that would give him an edge on his next OER. He made rank easily. From 1993 to 1995, now Major Weil, found himself Chief of Personnel for the 20th Air Force, where his duties varied in extremes – from refreshing ice for important dignitaries to keeping track of visiting Russian officers at F.E. Warren's Base Exchange. Our next assignment was to SAC Headquarters at Offutt AFB, Nebraska. Major George E. Weil was a 'chariot of fire'.

Karma smiled upon me during our assignment to Strategic Air Command. Offutt AFB was near Omaha, and Major Weil was now Chief of CINCSTRAT Protocol Operations. Fate had placed my nemesis (now) Colonel Roscoe E. Moulthrop, also at SAC Headquarters. Both men knew each other because of my brief stint as Moulthrop's executive officer back in 1986. While engaged in the day-to-day operations of defending our national security; word came down that a visit from SMES was imminent. Every facet of a commander's success rested on the skill and responsibilities of his people. They can make or break you.

The 3901st SMES inspection meant simulated wartime scenarios. The SAC Command Post was activated in response to these exercises – exactly where Col Moulthrop was orchestrating his resources to address the threat. SMES needed someone to infiltrate the command post with a simulated bomb. Major Weil was more than happy to oblige. George was given a woman's ID and rank and set to try to get past the security police guard to the command post. Faking distress and panic at being late, George pleaded with the security

airman for quick entry. Both George and the Inspector General (from SMES) entered the command center and proceeded to the secondary level where key personnel were working. Col. Moulthrop saw George enter the room and started to get up. Too late. George went over to the Wing Commander and handed him a card: ***BOOM*** !

Ahhh…. payback is a bitch! *(But I felt sorry for the Security Police guard.)*

Crystal and I were adapting to this gypsy lifestyle, since the military did all the packing and moving. It was, however, left up to me to secure civilian lodging that would accept pets – namely cats. Our first rental was virtually next door to the Southgate of Offutt AFB. The 1920's farmhouse we rented was alone in a field of fallow farmland. The wet ditches with overgrown, odd smelling weeds were host to nighttime points of light. The flickering lights were frightening, before we realized they were not eye shine, but luminescence from dancing fireflies. We did not stay long in this location, barely a couple of days actually – for 3 reasons. #1) The farmhouse electrical system sent sparks flying when I plugged in our dryer. #2) A foul stench bloomed as we were downwind to a neighboring rendering plant, and #3) That odd smelling ditch weed turned out to include a field of homegrown marijuana behind a shed.

The military was not very happy having to relocate our sizeable amount of household goods, to the neighboring town of Plattsmouth, where I was able to find a cat friendly rental.

We stayed at Offutt for about 2 years, securing base officer housing for the last 18 months. George was rubbing much bigger elbows now, to where Crystal and I were left to our own devices. I easily secured a position at the Offutt Frame Shop, and Crystal was enrolled in yet another new school.

It was 1997 and Crystal was 12 years old. Her altruistic, feisty personality took hold, and she made new friends easily. Not a shy person by nature, Crystal loudly confronted bullies on the school bus that were tormenting her new friends. She developed computer and musical skills during this time. Again, George would not find the time to appreciate her. I was sad, yet proud as I sat alone in a large audience of parents, as Crystal participated in a city-wide musical performance, stroking the bow of her violin in rhythm with her classmates.

Crystal doted on her father and craved any attention he would give her. They both took up bicycle riding. George, eager to make his mark in the world, designed AF sponsored spandex team jerseys and commemorative coins for the RAGBRAI (Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa). Crystal stayed home of course but was later able to have her father join her on a bike ride through Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha.

Out of the blue – George indicated he wanted a divorce.

My initial reaction was a panic attack – dizzy, nausea, heart palpitations. My near swoon caused brief empathy from George. In the numbing aftermath, where George clearly had not thought through his desires, I eventually told him, "*I don't believe you!*" and went about life as normal as I could. Since we were living in "family" housing, a divorce meant Crystal and I would have to move off base. To ensure my daughter's moral compass, I struggled to sustain my marriage.

The very first whiff of worry arose as George was blooming in the Air Force big leagues. A military husband's sudden desire to 'cut and run' from his wife and child, was a relatively common phenomenon apparently. It happened to three military families we knew. Something was missing from the male psych that drove them to lust after a new, shiny boy toy. The women that endured a divorce all had young children that were devastated. When I talked with them over lunch or coffee, they described the panic and anger they felt – not only in themselves but of their children. The stress hurt them all.

Not willing to be cast away so rudely, I buckled down to consider what was really going on. George did not talk to me. He was short tempered and rude. I had a vague feeling he wanted to be the 'knight in shining armor' to a pretty, young mother with little children, who had suddenly been widowed. This alarmed me, as I remembered how easily he cut ties with his first wife and three sons.

Once I regained my equilibrium, I began to tackle the situation rationally. I took Crystal along as I looked for rental houses in the local area – explaining to my naïve husband the

monetary logistics of divorce. We would have to vacate base housing. Could he support two households? As my husband chewed on this revelation, I truly had no idea what was going on. So, I hired a private detective….

I took the drastic measure to have George followed after work one Friday. After a tense weekend, I went back to the detective agency the following Monday for their report. I was very disappointed to learn the detective lost George in traffic. Frustrated, I left their office and headed home. Dang it! I had to do something! So, I turned around and drove back to the detective agency. The secretary was surprised to see me again, until I asked her for a favor. I pointed to the office trash can.

"*Would you do up a manila envelope with your agency logo, stuff it with scrap paper, mark it, 'Confidential – Eyes Only', and let me take it home*?"

The secretary's eyes lit up and she smiled, "*Sure*!"

Armed with my 'proof', I went home and called George at work. With the most humble, frightened voice I could muster, I confessed I had him followed and I was holding their report.

"*I don't want to open it…we need to talk.*"

Within minutes a frantic Major Weil burst into the duplex and found me sitting in our bedroom, holding a fat manilla envelope. George's flurry of disbelief and panic filled rhetoric clearly proved I was on to him. In a noble gesture of forgiveness, I offered to burn the report – unopened.

As I toasted the 'report' on the BBQ grill, George was making a frantic phone call. Obviously, George saw his career flash before his eyes. I was unaware at the time, but George had the rank of General pinned to the inside of his uniform cap. The star he was striving to achieve someday was still possible. I had just saved him from himself.

Around this timeframe I had become so disgusted with men. My sadness drifted back to a time when I was truly happy – however brief. I still had an address-o-graph metal plate used in Hill AFB admissions paperwork; the one used to admit Robert Randolph. It had his social security number on it, and I was able to sweetly talk an IRS employee into forwarding a letter to him.

And Bobby replied.